

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8295

INFO AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 2042

DEPT PASS HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, PEPR, ET, FR, DJ

SUBJECT: ETHIO-FRENCH RELATIONS; CONCERN OVER DJIBOUTI

SUMMARY: CHAIRMAN MENGISTU TOLD DEPARTING FRENCH AMBASSADOR BARBIER THAT DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT GOULED HAS UPSET ETHNIC BALANCE AND STABILITY THERE, ONLY AHMED DINI CAN RESTORE SITUATION AND FRENCH CAN BRING IT ABOUT. OTHER ISSUES WERE PRIMARILY BILATERAL, E.G., FRENCH TECHNICAL COOPERATION AND DIRE DAWA CONSULATE. FRENCH EMBASSY CONSIDERS THEY HAVE RECEIVED ORAL AGREEMENT FOR NEW AMBASSADOR, BUT RETAIN SLIGHT SKEPTICISM UNTIL CONFIRMING NOTE ARRIVES. END SUMMARY.

1. FRENCH CHARGE PIERRE NOLET (AMBASSADOR BARBIER DEPARTED ADDIS FOR GOOD MORNING MAY 5) GAVE ME MORE INFORMATION (SEPTTEL) ON MENGISTU-BARBIER MAY 3 MEETING DURING CALL THIS AFTERNOON TO PRESENT NEW FRENCH SECOND COUNSELOR. MEETING, HE SAID, WAS LARGELY DEVOTED TO DJIBOUTI, WITH MENGISTU BREAKING HIS PRESENTATION DOWN INTO ANALYSIS OF SITUATION, RECOMMENDATION FOR SOLUTION AND THREATS.

2. IN BRIEF, MENGISTU CLAIMED THAT DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT GOULED

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HAS UPSET ETHNIC BALANCE IN DJIBOUTI IN FAVOR OF ISSAS AND RESULT CAN ONLY LEAD TO INSTABILITY WHICH IS THREAT TO IMPORTANT ETHIOPIAN ECONOMIC LIFELINE. MENGISTU BELIEVES THAT RETURN OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER AHMED DINI TO DJIBOUTI GOVT AND INCLUSION OTHER IMPORTANT AFAR MINISTERS ARE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY CONDITIONS. MENGISTU BELIEVES ONLY FRENCH CAN BRING ABOUT RESTORATION OF STABILITY. TO GET THIS POINT ACROSS IS PROBABLY

WHY MENGISTU MADE SUCH A POINT OF ASKING BARBIER TO POSTPONE DEPARTURE UNTIL AFTER HIS RETURN FROM CUBA. BARBIER INSISTED FRENCH WERE AS INTERESTED AS ETHIOPIANS IN DJIBOUTI STABILITY BUT REMINDED MENGISTU THAT THEY WERE NO LONGER PRIMARY POLITICAL FACTOR IN DJIBOUTI EQUATION.

3. MENGISTU ALSO TOLD BARBIER THAT ETHIOPIANS ARE WORKING TO GET RAILROAD OPENED ALL THE WAY FROM DIRE DAWA TO DJIBOUTI IN TIME FOR JUNE 27 FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF DJIBOUTI INDEPENDENCE, AS SYMBOL OF THEIR EARNESTNESS ABOUT THAT INDEPENDENCE. (OTHER SOURCES BELIEVE RR WILL NOT OPEN BEFORE JULY.) FINALLY, MENGISTU MADE VAGUE THREATS ABOUT ETHIOPIA HAVING TO TAKE ACTION UNLESS GOULED RETURNS TO HIS SENSES. HE APPARENTLY REFRAINED, HOWEVER, FROM MAKING THREATS OF DIRECT MILITARY INTERVENTION OR OF INFILTRATING CUBAN-TRAINED AFARS BUT LEFT IT TO MENTIONING POSSIBILITY OF EAST GERMANS BUILDING ASSAB-AWASH RAILROAD, THUS BY-PASSING ENTIRELY DJIBOUTI.

4. MENGISTU NOTED THAT BECAUSE MAY DAY WAS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF GOOD-WILL HE HAD SPECIFICALLY AVOIDED ATTACKING ANY COUNTRY IN HIS ADDRESS AND HOPED FRENCH HAD TAKEN NOTE. BARBIER ASSURED HIM THAT FRANCE AND HER FRIENDS HAD INDEED. OTHER ISSUES WERE MAINLY BILATERAL. MENGISTU ASKED FOR INCREASED FRENCH TECHNICAL COOPERATION TO WHICH BARBIER REPLIED CONVENING OF MIXED COMMISSION, SCHEDULED BIENNALLY BETWEEN JANUARY AND JULY AND DUE THIS YEAR, WAS UP TO PMGSE. FRENCH EMBASSY HAS SENT CONFIDENTIAL

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SEVERAL NOTES ON SUBJECT BUT SO FAR HAD NOT RECEIVED ANSWER. BARBIER RAISED QUESTION OF RETURN OF FRENCH PERSONNEL TO CONSULATE AT DIRE DAWA TO WHICH MENGISTU GAVE NONCOMMITTAL COMMENT TO FOREIGN MINISTER FELLEKE, PRESENT AT MEETING, TO PREPARE REPLY.

5. FOLLOWING NOLET'S CONVERSATION WITH ME AT FELLEKE'S MAY 4 LUNCH IN HONOR OF BARBIER REPORTED SEPTEL, FOREIGN MINISTER TOLD FRENCH AMBASSADOR HE COULD GO AHEAD AND CABLE PARIS THAT AGREEMENT HAD BEEN GIVEN FOR SUCCESSOR AMBASSADOR ROUSSEYE (PHONETIC; PRESENTLY IN MONTEVIDEO) AND THAT WRITTEN CONFIRMATION WOULD COME MAY 5. AS OF 1600 LOCAL NOTE HAD NOT ARRIVED BUT NOLET PROMISED TO KEEP ME INFORMED. AT THIS POINT FRENCH ARE 95 PERCENT SURE AGREEMENT HAS BEEN GRANTED BUT, KNOWING OF OTHER COUNTRIES' PROBLEMS ALONG THIS LINE, RETAIN AT LEAST SLIGHT RESERVE. MATHERON

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED AFRICA COLLECTIVE.

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